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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 001931

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [CU](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: PRES. PALACIO CONSIDERS, THEN REJECTS VISIT TO CUBA

REF: SECSTATE 149883

Classified By: PolChief Erik Hall for reason 1.4 (b&d)

[11](#). (C) Summary. On August 17, President Palacio shared with Charge his inclination to attend a ceremony in Havana for graduating Ecuadorian medical students on August 20. Doing so would boost his international standing, he said, offering Latin America an alternative regional leader to Hugo Chavez. If the USG objected, he would cancel the trip. After consulting with the Department, we advised against the presidential visit to Havana. Palacio agreed to send an emissary instead. End Summary.

[12](#). (C) Palacio summoned Charge to meet with him on August [17](#). The Cuba trip was first on his agenda. Other subjects will be reported via septels.

[13](#). (C) Palacio said that he had been called the night before and invited to attend the graduation ceremony on August 20 of 500-plus Ecuadorian students of medicine in Havana. By visiting Havana, he believed, he could offer the South American region a more centrist alternative for regional leadership. President Uribe is too identified with the U.S. to have regional credibility. Sensitive to USG views on Cuba, he would defer the visit if the USG objected.

[14](#). (C) After consulting with the Department, the Charge told Palacio that the USG would consider a presidential visit to Havana at this time to be unhelpful. He suggested Palacio ask his Ambassador in Havana to represent him at the ceremony instead. Palacio was not pleased with this suggestion, but perked up visibly when the Charge suggested the Minister of Health as another alternative.

[15](#). (C) Comment: For an unelected interim president, Palacio has surprisingly unrealistic ambitions to enter the regional stage. With less than 18 months left in his presidency, if that; no political base; and barred from re-election until 2010; such ambitions border on the irrational. Palacio's reputed narcissism as a medical authority is starting to appear also in the political realm. It is balanced, however, with the good sense to check with us before taking action.

MEMMOTT